

CONFIRMATION CONVERSATIONS

WHAT PARENTS
and teens
NEED TO KNOW

CONNIE CLARK

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT CONFIRMATION

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What happens on retreat? I have a soccer game (or AP test or homecoming or something else that's important in my life) that weekend. 20

No one said anything about going to confession. Can't we just skip that? 22

A bunch of my friends are going to a prayer meeting. Couldn't I just do that instead of going to Mass? 24

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Why do I have to do this?

As your child prepares for confirmation, you might hear this question, although it might be worded differently at your house. It might not even be spoken in words—some parents hear it in the sound of the car door slamming as they drop off their kids at confirmation prep sessions. But it's a beautiful question, whether kids ask it outright or not, because it can lead to the deeper conversations families need to have. By exploring the **why** of the sacrament together, you and your child can deepen your understanding of **what** is about to happen and get insights into **where** God might be leading you, today and throughout your life. And what teenager isn't wondering about that right now?

As a parent and confirmation leader, I hear this question from students and parents alike. So I've gathered some quick ideas for how you can respond to this and other commonly asked questions about confirmation. Each reflection begins with a question I've heard kids and teens ask. What follows isn't the answer, because, let's be honest. When kids ask questions like this, will the answers we give really satisfy them? Instead, here you'll find things to think about, and ways to turn questions (or stony silence) into more fruitful conversations.

May these and all your family discussions be enlightened by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so that you can keep communicating and praying together as you journey together toward God's Kingdom.

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But really, why do I have to do this?

For some parents, there are three possible answers here:

Because I said so.

Because that's what our family does.

Because God says so.

Sure, these might be conversation enders, but would it surprise you to know that each has a tiny grain of truth? Let's start with **Because I said so**. At your child's baptism, the priest or deacon said something like this:

You are accepting the responsibility of training your child in the practice of the faith.

It will be your duty to bring him or her up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?

And you answered, "I do." So, saying your child should get confirmed because you said so isn't completely dismissive. You're simply reminding yourself of a promise you made to God. A better way to phrase it might be: *"I made a promise to God to teach you his ways. Why don't we both try to understand what this is all about?"*

Because that's what our family does is a more powerful reason than we might realize. The sacraments of initiation, which include baptism, Eucharist, and confirmation, welcome us into God's family, the mystical body of Christ. That includes everyone in the church, in heaven and on earth—which means your bap-

tized relatives, along with people like St. Teresa of Calcutta and St. Peter. What an impressive family we have! Invite your child to discover this family through preparation for the sacrament. (Bonus—parents who accompany their children on this journey can receive graces and new spiritual insights, too!)

Finally, there's **Because God says so**. Now, let's be clear. God never forces anyone to do anything. God has given us freedom and a conscience to make our own choices. But he doesn't leave us alone either. Before Jesus went to heaven, he promised to send

an Advocate: that's the Holy Spirit. God isn't telling your son or daughter to be confirmed, but he is making an incredible offer to give *himself* to your child. Think about that as your child prepares.

PS... The best way to approach this question is to take an active role in confirmation preparation. I know you're stressed out, with responsibilities and pressures. But think how much better you'll handle those if you let God guide you here. There are many ways to get involved that won't take a lot of time. Talk with your pastor or confirmation director. It will be worthwhile, I promise.

More to think about...

- What do I remember about getting ready for my child's baptism and First Communion? How will this be the same, and different?
- What might God be trying to tell me during these days of preparation?

MY PRAYER

Loving God, thank you for this beautiful, amazing child you have given me. Strengthen your gifts in me, that I might guide my child to you in faith and love.

What's a sponsor, and why do I need one?

Imagine you and your child are on a college visit. You tour classrooms and dorms and talk to professors, deans, and coaches. But one thing is missing. You don't see any students. There's no one to talk about campus life, or the challenges your child might face. That would be a pretty big piece of the picture to leave out, wouldn't it? Now imagine your child preparing for a new stage of life as an active adult Christian. Wouldn't it be great to have the guidance of someone who's been there? Someone who can listen and pray with your child? That's the role of a sponsor. Sure, it can feel like a weighty responsibility. But don't let it deter the person your child chooses. A sponsor doesn't need to have all the answers or be a perfect Catholic. They simply need to be willing to walk with your child on the path ahead.

Is your child uncomfortable with the idea of a sponsor? Maybe she's chosen a distant relative she doesn't know very well. This is a time to have an honest conversation. You might start generally, about the importance of having people who guide us. You could begin something like this:

Remember that time when you... (talk about something your child accomplished). **Who helped or motivated you? What did they do or say that made a difference?** Share with your child stories about people who have guided you in your life (maybe your own sponsor), and how important it was to have that support. From here, you might have a conversation about what makes a good sponsor.

PS... If your child still hasn't chosen a sponsor, it might be time to offer some guidance. You could suggest your child's baptismal godparents. This is a great way to show the connection between the two sacraments. If this isn't a feasible option, look to someone who will nurture your child's faith. A sponsor needs to be confirmed and in good standing with the church. Sorry, but parents can't be our own children's sponsors. If you sincerely can't find anyone, talk to your pastor or confirmation director. There are people in your parish program, especially confirmed youth, who would love to be sponsors. (For everyone's safety, make sure they've been thoroughly vetted. Feel free to attend any events with your child and the sponsor until you—and your child—are comfortable.)

More to think about...

- Am I finding the right balance in helping my child choose a sponsor? Am I pushing for a particular family friend or relative that my child is uncomfortable with? Or, does my child need more guidance from me in choosing a sponsor?

MY PRAYER

Jesus, send good, reverent people to walk this journey at my child's side; people who will listen, care, and pray for my child.